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Tremont Oral History Project

Interview with Erich Hooper  
Interviewed by Kurt Malecek  
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Categories  
Tremont 1960-2003

Kurt Malecek: What is your name and can you spell it for me?

Erich Hooper: Erich Hooper, E-R-I-C-H H-O-O-P-E-R.

KM: Thank you okay so when did you move to Tremont?

EH: We moved into Tremont I'd say around 1962.

KM: Okay and about how old were you when you moved here?

EH: About six years old, seven.

KM: Okay and what are some of your early childhood memories from living in Tremont?

EH: Tremont was a very interesting place. We moved here from the East Side of Cleveland and from there we were in New York City so I've seen a lot of people and different cultures. That was one of the things brought first to our attention about the Tremont area and the West Side of Cleveland.

KM: Okay. So what kind of things did you here when you first moved here like as a kid where did you go and play what kind of games did you play.

EH: At that time then Cleveland recreation department director John Nagy had implemented a sports program and the AAUs in the Cleveland were really big. Such Olympic legends as Harrison Dillard, Ida Gene Hopkins who rode the luge and worked at Lincoln Park recreation center Lou Salchik professional football and basketball player at Ohio University as well as the NBA and the NFL Milt Morren these kind of people and adults were in the area through the sports program that was implemented. A lot of our free time was spent in the parks running and jumping and climbing just learning basic fundamentals of how to be agile and eventually get into sports.

KM: Sounds like fun stuff. What was the AAU?

EH: The Amateur Athletic Union this was a track and field the Olympic junior Olympics if you will. This was a big push in the area. It brought together because of the diversity of the Olympics this brought together a lot of different ethnic groups intermingling when we were kids during sports activities, which was not really common in the Tremont area at the time. It was basically your Polish, your Czechs, your Germans, your Hungarians, hope I'm not forgetting anybody. [laughter] But there were a lot of different nationalities in the area in little pockets if you will and meeting the younger kids of those families through athletics is how I kind of and our family intermingled in the area at the time.

KM: Okay, When your family first moved here how were you treated in the community?

EH: We pretty much stayed within the area that we lived in. Having to come outside the projects back then was sometime difficult. I know there wasn't really a set curfew in the area, but you knew if you were caught out late at night you know probably there would be a gang of kids that were going to beat you up. There were a lot of little ethnic gangs if you will and just bad kids, punks that hung out at the park. They called themselves the Lincoln Park Rats.

KM: Oh.

EH: This was kind of during the day of you know the West Side Story takeoff. It was pretty hilarious, but nonetheless if you know during the riots in the area at Lincoln Junior High School and some at Tremont you know a lot of our friends got beat up pretty bad so it was you know you kind of stayed within your group and took to your business.

KM: Were you ever beat up yourself, er?

EH: No, I was pretty fast. [laughter] I could out run--. Most of my fights came one on one in the area being challenged or being caught you know and luckily at the time it wasn't really a gang beating that you got back then it was more or less a man to man kind of thing fights that you got in, but still these roving packs [laughter] would have their way with you if they caught you.

KM: Oh boy. So what school did you go to in the area?

EH: I went to Tremont School. Lovely school, huge building five different floors--. I spent a lot of my time of course in the gymnasium area with George Chandick who was our gym teacher, famous person in the area I think he's now the mayor of Seven Hills. The top floors were the music floors and then the wings of the building there were higher level classrooms with different projects science, math, English of those natures and the arts. The basement was strictly for lunch and kindergarteners. [laughter]

KM: Did you play any sports through the school?

EH: Tremont really didn't offer sports. There was athletics per se and once a year the students would play the teachers in a softball game in the parking lot. And at these matches there would be anywhere from five to six hundred people including neighborhood people because this was an annual event. It was pretty awesome. There was a teacher that I had, Mrs. Gingrich I think her name was I hope I remember she was a very nice sweet lady. She was German and she kind of tutored me on the side in some of the classes that I had with her, but she actually gave a check for two hundred dollars to buy uniforms for our little league team and I remember that. And she was a very strong influence into Tremont School itself.

KM: [pause] Overall, how would you characterize like racial tension when you moved into Tremont or just in the 60s basically?

EH: It was more ethnic in this area, different European cultures disliking them for whatever reason the Irish and the Italians, the Germans and everybody. [laughter] But there were Greeks in the area still are today. The Russian Orthodox cause I live closer to St. Theodosius but I know a lot of my time was spent at St. John Cantius cause those were the kids that were involved in the sports that we were dealing with. St. Augustine's Church has always been a beacon in the neighborhood for minorities and different cultures coming together. They had a roller skating rink at the top of the church and that was pretty cool. And you know but getting up there and getting back was always the effort. [laughter] You would have to run across the park. [laughter]

KM: What church did you start going to when you come here? Did you go to a church or?

EH: Yeah I started going to St. Augustine and then for some reason--. Oh I had Boy Scouts at St. () excuse me I had Boy Scouts at Pilgrim Church. So it being in the area closer I could walk there and it was kind of a huge congregation. All the churches in the area had large congregations you know sometimes standing room only of course on holidays you know everyone would you know pretty () much attend church on a regular Sunday basis it was a strong ethnic, cultural [pause] presence if you will.

KM: Sure, sure. Has that changed at all the attendance wise, er?

EH: Now I go to Imanuel Lutheran Church and it's one of the older churches in the area--it's a German Church--. Our congregation is about one hundred, one hundred and thirty five on Sunday and then on the German services in the morning at ten they're usually getting about eighty nine to one hundred. That age group is slowly dwindling down and that's one of the concerns in our church is retaining people--younger people--to come in reuniting families you know in religion and bringing them into church.

KM: [pause] Where did your parents work when you when they first moved here?

EH: My dad was a musician nicknamed Boogey Woogey Red [laughter] he did the scene in Cleveland. He didn't really live with us anymore--my parent separated--. My mother worked for CMHA and that allowed us to kind of move around into their different

facilities. You know one of them of course was over here in Tremont after the riots. My mom was a great person. She went to college, she played basketball. Her mother LuEllen owned a beauty shop in the area on the east side and I remember as a kid going over there and sneaking pops out of her cooler. [laughter]

KM: So the house you lived in in Tremont when you were you were a kid, could you tell me a little a little about that?

EH: It wasn't really a house. It was an apartment, the projects if you will. It was a row building, up to five or six families per building made of stone, pretty nice, well maintained at the time. It being changed over from being a poor white facility doing to now being a poor black facility which was a transferring as the white flight was happening in Tremont. People were starting to move out and move into Parma, Lakewood, and North Ridgeville and these areas as you know things were east as minorities were pushing west. The Hispanics came in about that time also and had a strong pocket of people you know that helped mix.

KM: How many people lived in the apartment with you ?

EH: There was my older brother-- (Tape Edited)

KM: --did they have any problems with gangs in the area?

EH: My brother--(Tape Edited)--me kind of thrived on things like that (). You would have to as I said you would have to be able to stand up to be able to walk around in the area you know and his age group--(Tape Edited)--so he was pretty much a man of his own as far as defending himself and the older guys that protected us younger kids you know those were things that they you know dealt with.

KM: What was Tremont like when Carl Stokes was elected mayor of Cleveland?

EH: Oh it was vibrant, it was scary. There was hope that things as the Constitution says in this country that it would be fulfilled. This was a very challenging time in America you know and these things exist and this was one of these chances that the promise could be kept.

KM: Do you think it had a good effect then, cause office as mayor or Carl Stokes being mayor then.

EH: I don't know if Carl was really a puppet if you will put up there to quell the riots at the time. I don't know if you could say that it brought everyone together because there is still this same if you will division in Cleveland housing wise don't date my daughter wise you're not good enough mentality. You know that's probably pretty much in the whole country.

KM: Sure, Sure. How about the '70s what was Tremont like during the '70s? It's kind of a broad period but?

EH: Yeah Tremont in the '70s was kind of funny. Believe it or not the culture of disco and dance and touching was rekindled and [laughter] I remember as a child seeing the older people doing the old traditional hand dances and holding each other. The '70s was kind of that kind of a feeling in the Tremont area. People were loosening up if you will socializing outside of the school structure they were socializing outside of the neighborhood confines you know they were mingling if you will on an older basis mentally.

KM: So the different ethnicities were mingling more so?

EH: Yes well also a lot of them had left the older ethnics and the younger ones that stayed on were more excepting if you will--I am you you are me philosophy.

KM: That's good. Were there still problems with gangs, then?

EH: No they had pretty much dwindled down to zero. The gang thing in Tremont was more of an older guys being tougher than you know the next guy because you're a Czech or you're a Pole and you know that kind of thoughts.

KM: Okay. What about Tremont when Dennis Kucinich was mayor, what was it like?

EH: Oh Dennis, you gotta love the guy I tell you what I'm so proud of him. He's going to be inducted in the St. John Cantius football hall of fame and he was on the team, he's a tough little gnat and I think it's funny--. Times when Dennis was helping Tremont--as he still does--and trying to help Cleveland were special times in Tremont. This was a neighborhood person a virtual saint in political aspects and thoughts and what he wanted to do politically for Cleveland and open the doors if you will for total exceptance of everyone. The politics has kind of soured him I think that you know he really can't get that job done. There's too many rungs on a ladder to make a ladder and I think he sees that now and by running for president I think he can achieve those goals and make a difference as some of the great presidents have in this country. But in the area when he was councilman things were getting done there were stores that were staying in the area the jobs were still here in area any federal money that was available Dennis it was directed in our area as our coucilman. He had a strong political voice in the those times, too, and what he said basically was verbatim the truth and he always spoke his mind. That's why he was a menace.

KM: Now, do know the reaction around Tremont when the river caught fire?

EH: You know that wasn't really a Tremont thing. That was more in the Ohio City area and more of in the flats area if you will. Those separations through the natural barriers of the river the way the river winds and it takes fifteen minutes to get from my house to Shooters by canoe. It's pretty cool [laughter]. It takes two hours to get back. But that was more or less on that side of the river. On our side of the river where the railroad and the industrial mill is at there really aren't a lot of fish in the area anymore and I remember that as a child catching tadpoles and craw daddies and using those for science projects and bugs and water spiders. Now the area that river has pretty much maintained its sameness if not gotten a little bit cleaner because of the down slough of the mill itself you know not using the water ways as

much. A lot of times we talk about canoeing down to Akron to see the Akron Aeros and I say well it's better to canoe down than to try and canoe back. [laughter]

KM: Did you have any did you ever have a job in Tremont did you work around here at all?

EH: Yeah I worked constantly to help my mother so did my brother--(Tape Edited)--started our own little shoe shine stand and we would go to the neighborhood bars and shine the old guys' shoes for whatever we could get. Another good one was to shovel walks for the elderly since there was a lot in the area and we could make money that way. The hard part was trying to get a shovel. [laughter] We're poor what are we gonna make a shovel out of () get a street sign. But yeah so we shined shoes, we collected bottles--back in the old days bottles were worth money--we worked at the little grocery store in the area carrying bags for people. We eventually got paper routes although it was hard as a minority to get a paper route in the area they would give them to the Puerto Ricans at the time but you know in this area it wasn't available to us I thought.

KM: Could you tell me a little about why your parents decided to move to Tremont?

EH: It was basically my mother's decision you know we were living with our mother of course. Tremont and the area visually was something that was going to stay the way it is. The beauty of it, the homes--. I don't know if my mother foresaw this or this was just somewhere they stationed her for CMHA but--. And The long term goal of the area and what happening in the old projects now there's a thing called the Phoenix project where they're going to level some of the projects and they're building these huge homes to overlook the valley and the ball fields.

KM: I've seen them.

EH: I have a an acre land out here and I'm really scared because there have been houses being burnt down in the area you know and new houses going up on it. The number is quite alarming I feel per household.

KM: So how do you feel about the new houses being built around here?

EH: They're nice. I would rather see brick homes going up in that sort of nature to stay to the historic nature presence of the area. You know all the churches are huge brick, all the nicer homes are brick. These prefab things that they're putting up they're aesthetically they look nice overlooking the city, but the feng shui is all wrong for the neighborhood. It's like putting a giant watermelon on top of a grape. [laughter] You know nice thought but in reality it's going to squash the grape.

KM: It's a good analogy. [laughter] What are some of the social places that you and your parents visited? Oh, oh you and your brother visited and your family when you were younger?

EH: We would go up to Merrick House. Merrick House offered a lot of different educational things as well as athletics training if you will. They were the neighborhood center. There was also in the projects the Valley View Center where Mr. Hagherty, Joe's dad would show movies and popcorn and candy and it was a place where the different nationalities that lived in the projects could mingle as kids also. That was a nice thing to do. Tremont offered a lot of different and the area we lived in in the projects offered a lot different venues. There was ball fields and playgrounds inside the compound if you will. There was a huge strip of land--Quiggly Road--where cars would drag race you know. There was the river itself you could play on and around. And then there were centers in the area that you could go to such as the Tremont opportunities center and Merrick House and St. John Cantius Church—they had a bowling alley there. I can bowl quite well thank you. [laughter] It was all learned as a kid. Pinball was a big thing in the time there aren't really any pinball games left in the area, although Holdt's bar still has a shuffleboard table top and that's kind of a classic old world game and chess is still played up in the park.

KM: Did you ever go to Lincoln Park a lot when you were a kid?

EH: Oh yeah, I played peewee football for the Milt Morns and that was a team sponsored by Lincoln Recreation Center and the Cleveland City Recreation Department. Playing baseball also for them we were city champs a couple of times. We had a fantastic team. Kind of an ideal situation where we had great Italian baseball players as kids, great Puerto Ricans, great blacks, and great ethnics you know. So it was kind of an all nations baseball squad and we basically dominated the Cleveland baseball scene as kids--as I showed you in some of the scrapbooks--.

KM: That's great. How about some of your memories of the construction of the highways?

EH: That was pretty bizarre because it took a really long time to actually happen. When they bought, burned and acquired land around the freeway area where it was where it is today. That kind of happened kind of mysteriously if you will. I remember as a kid again there were a lot of fires and that was a memory that stuck out. Whenever these things are happening there's always quite a few fires in the area. There was a hill there that we could walk down or bicycle down. We were building soap box derby cars also soap box derby--was big in the neighborhood--and we would go up and down the hills on those. We you could sled down them in the winter. The freeway coming through--. It took along time. It took long enough that we could go through junior high school and some of elementary school by the time they completed the project. I don't know why. It's a marvelous system now. It moves a lot of cars daily. Aesthetically looking at it, there are no sound barriers to protect us from the sound like they do in some of the areas, so I can hear a lot of the car traffic and truck traffic. With the freeway coming in now, helicopters from the radio and TV stations are flying over the neighborhood 5 o'clock in the morning you know for some reason really low. And then there's Metro life flight that follows the patterns over the freeway you know responding to accidents. It's brought a lot more noise and I've noticed that the animals in the area have changed also. There used to be a lot of opossums and squirrels and chipmunks and beavers from the river and groundhogs and just you know wilder animals if you will,

rabbits, cats, dog, plentiful deer in area now that's dwindled down to a handful. Last time I counted--my wife and I--we counted thirty-six kinds of birds in our area in Tremont and I live by the park. We get a lot of fly overs from the zoo since the zoo is so close their birds--some of their birds--fly free are also in the area. Hawks, different kinds of buzzards if you will. Cleveland's known for their buzzards.

KM: Oh. [laughter]

EH: You know it's in the area.

KM: So the freeway really changed the environment then?

EH: Oh yeah, definitely, definitely.

KM: Now you mentioned you were married?

EH: Yeah, I've been married fifteen years.

KM: Now did you marry someone from the area?

EH: No unfortunately I'm sorry, no, no I didn't [laughter] no Heidi's from Lutheran West and she grew up in Bay Village and Lakewood. I met her--I worked in the Flats at a jazz club--she worked in another restaurant across the street or the river if you will and that's how I met her.

KM: Were you married in the area?

EH: Yeah we got married at Immanuel Lutheran Church.

KM: Okay hmmhmm. And did you have a reception in the area?

EH: Yeah, I'm a chef so I catered the wedding myself and had a friend bake the cake-- Dave Green--both my wife and I being in the restaurant business we utilized our resources and I've got friends to play before the service with a slide guitar--someone in the restaurant business--I got the flowers from friends in flower shops. You know things of that nature cutting costs I use a friend's warehouse down in the warehouse district. I use to--. When I met Heidi I lived downtown in the warehouse district and it was basically build your own bathroom and kitchen style you know five thousand feet for two hundred bucks. Now it's like sixteen to two thousand bucks per flat. In those days in the old warehouse district you know you could do anything that you want. So we thought this massive reception party for all of our restaurant people friends that couldn't attend the wedding and I'd say there was about two hundred people there.

KM: You sound like a man of many talents. [laughter]

EH: Yeah, growing up in the area you had to have a lot of different talents to survive. It carried me through college, too. Down in Oxford and Athens where I went to school you know there weren't a lot of jobs available. Being a minority they're even tougher to get so you learn to be resourceful in other avenues and you learn to do different things. I've done stand up comedy for money, I've done vending you know you name it if it's a good honest hard working living I can dabble my hand into it and put food on the table.

KM: That's pretty cool. [laughter] Were you in the area in the 80s? In Tremont, er?

EH: Yeah I went away to school in '77 and came back of course every summer. I worked for the Cleveland Recreation Department. I got out in '81 and came back. At that time during that period they had closed the Abbey bridge which cut us off from Ohio City and walking to the West Side Market so our food resource was really kind of stifled. Tremont's always had a lot of gardening in its blood and everyone in the area has a garden. I have a nice garden. So keeping the food that way was a thing that always happened in Tremont. But being cut off from the West Side Market with the Abbey Bridge really hurt the neighborhood. It being back now is revitalized us and linked us back into downtown and the Ohio City area, which is our sister city.

KM: How long was it closed for?

EH: I'm guessing maybe five years. The same thing happened when they tore down the Clark Avenue bridge that connected us over to Harvard and the east side and South High which had another large ethnic group of people in that area.

KM: [pause] How about when Voinovich was mayor? Did he have any kind of effect on Tremont that you noticed or er?

EH: [pause] Mayor Voinovich's itinerary and vision for Cleveland and Tremont and his projects that he set up that were carried out through Mike White's administration--. When I was a chef for the city of Cleveland I worked at the Warrensville jail for five years. When George and Mike were in office a lot of the projects they set down were carried through. His influence being an ethnic also and his love for the church itself helped out the Tremont area. Mayor Voinovich was a good mayor for the city of Cleveland. Being a Republican, his political bedfellows and the pockets that were able to line the city's coffers helped the city greatly and basically put it back on track to being the great city that it is now.

KM: Now you were mentioning that you would go and shop at the West Side Market, where would you get your food from when you first moved here with your family?

EH: We would use the West Side Market's facility. We would use the church's hunger center for food if had to be. Mother was very frugal and she worked so it was not a problem of keeping food on the table, but the market offered an avenue that was really unique and old world if you will the way it exists today where if you go up there with thirty five cents and get a sandwich and some lunch meat and a piece of fruit and you could drink water and you could socialize and you could carry bags for people and make money. It was a basically a

mini job market that was available that you could hang out all day on Saturday and Friday after school to try to earn money.

KM: Hmm. What kind of places do you shop at now in Tremont, do you still go to the West Side Market?

EH: Oh yeah, I've worked at the market as I said I've had friends that own stands there. Over the years you see the vendor's families changing and the kids coming in to run the business. Some of the older people are still there and those are special relationships where you know you talk to Mr. Fox the cheese guy "Hey you going over to Great Lakes to get a pint." He says "I'll see you in an hour lad." [laughter] You know or I go up to some of the German stands and I talk about church business and the younger people in the church that I socialize with I can keep tabs on them also through that. Some of the newer stands that have come into the market the fresh pastas, the coffee stand, the new restaurant that they put in and some of the changes happening to the market now are interesting and the long term effect we'll have to see if it's been beneficial or was it correct the way it existed.

KM: Sure, sure. The shops in Tremont, have there been a lot of changes over the years?

EH: Oh definitely as I said it was an old world kind of a neighborhood where there was a bakery and butcher shop and a beauty parlor and a candy store--the Choo Choo Penny Store down the street--a candy store, a clothing store, your basic dentist shops and banks and other businesses that made up a neighborhood that made up a city, because Tremont was a neighborhood within a city of itself. Having such diversity that all your basic needs you could take care of right up in the area.

KM: Are there any activities that you participate in now in the community? Any kind of sports activities or anything?

EH: Yeah I'm still involved in the church area. I do some volunteer work in the area also. I go to the block club meetings and our neighborhood planning things of that nature. As far as the schools are concerned I go to career day at Lincoln West and still talk there. At Tremont School I always try to help out. I know a couple of the kids that went to school there with and there brothers and sisters they're teaching now at Tremont school and you know they know I'm just a phone call away from helping and that's kind of cool. St. Augustus Church I help during the summers when we have the Tremont Arts and Cultural festival as well as St. Mark's I donate my time to help them fund raise a food stand at the booth and that's a really strong and powerful thing I do for the neighborhood and the schools where that I get donations from the Cleveland Botanical Gardens, City Side Gardens to make these veggie stir fries and Orlando bakery donates bread to us and others Dave's and Tops and Heinens stores they all donate money to us to help pull this off for them and we make this huge veggie stir fry that's scrumdiddlyicious and all of it's donated from the city and the Botanical Gardens people like this and the Bratwurst we do for the German stand is for Five Star Meats and it's an old world butcher shop that's still in the area and you know they're a pretty well strong hot dog. Wiener, excuse me wiener. [laughter]

KM: That's really great. What's the Arts and Cultural Festival like in Tremont?

EH: It's growing this was our past fifth year of doing it. Fifty five hundred people was last years attendance this was the first year it didn't rain one day. It's beautiful, it's all the churches get together and the non-profit organizations and we fill the park with stands and there's entertainment and art. Artist have booths there selling their wares and I think it's just a year or two away from being a really major event in the city of Cleveland as well as for Tremont as far as opening our doors with the home tours and the church tours and the art galleries that have moved into the area and some of the top restaurants in the state of Ohio are located right here in Tremont.

KM: That's really great, yeah. [pause] Were you around when they were refurbishing Lincoln Park? Er fixing it up in the 80s?

EH: Yes, yes, yes and Lincoln Park is an interesting thing. Donated to the city, of course, and having restrictions on like Bay Village does on what they can do to their facilities. Lincoln Park is kind of an old dinosaur. There's rest rooms in the park in a building but they've been locked probably since 1962. [laughter] You know so there's no where to go to the bathroom when the pool is closed or in the summer. The pool is still there and is still being used quite vibrantly although I don't see as much softball and football being played where that's where you just don't see much of those kids around anymore doing those kind of games. It's more of a video culture now if you will. But you really don't see kids utilizing the parks. What you do see now are people walking their dogs and using the park in that kind of nature which is kind of cool but still they don't really clean up behind their animals and it is a city ordinance. They just don't seem to care or think about the park and those kind of things. I noticed some of the churches in the area use it for their day camps and their day care centers in the summer and there's quite a lot of activity in the park constantly you know except for after hours.

KM: Sure, sure. So overall would you say that just the park being there has had a positive effect on the community, or?

EH: Yes the park in the center of the neighborhood has always been a heart of activity a lot. In the old days rallies were held there mass meetings if you will, it was one of the hubs that things could happen in larger numbers. If you know--.

KM: What kind of rallies went on there, er?

EH: Political rallies as you said we were talking about during the Stokes days, during the Kucinich days, just during times of turbulence in the area, you know in Tremont itself.

KM: Okay. Well I think we can--.

END OF SIDE A

## START OF SIDE B

KM: () The mills polluted the river, there been any other kinds of pollution problems in the neighborhood?

EH: The air products plant has always been a stench if you will. Burnings of different nature, garbage used to be burned in the neighborhood, old world style you know. They'd pick up the trash but people would still you know throw it out their back door it was that kind of West Virginian mentality. [laughter] The river has been clean since then and it's with the mill coming and going if you will it's changed. The you know ecology of the river itself has really changed and its use has changed.

KM: How many places have you lived in in Tremont? Like start at the apartment and then?

EH: [pause] Three.

KM: Three?

EH: Yes, I rented a house one West 11<sup>th</sup> and then I bought one on West 11<sup>th</sup>.

KM: Different houses?

EH: From the projects into a home if you will, an actual house was a big step. Having enough money to do that and then actually purchasing one was a very big deal for me.

KM: When did you move into the first house? The rented house?

EH: When Heidi and I got married and that was lets see Martin he was born in () probably '80 '81.

KM: Could you describe the house a little bit for me?

EH: It's a Victorian home. Two levels if you will with an apartment upstairs for the older family and there was a house behind it that another woman stayed in. So actually three people could live on this property. There was a lot of that in the old days of Tremont where the family all stayed within one little structure if you will although two different homes. Fourteen foot ceilings, ten foot windows, there were nine of them, wooden floors, intricate, detailed woodwork around the beams of the house, some pillars inside of the home. It was a full basement. Huge bedrooms with sliding doors, that was the nature of the home in the area and those were the kind it was. When Tremont was being developed, the elite of the mill lived in the area and it was sort of like the Tremont heights where these older homes that where they stayed and the home that I live in now was probably just a supervisor's home if you will or someone of that nature because it's below the bunker of West 14<sup>th</sup> Street. It's a nice acre of land though and in the area my home lies on there used to be a river if you will. It was flooded at one time and so there's a lot of debris from that and of course the military

had their artillery down in this area and recently they found out that the during the Civil War that one of the brigades had actually stayed down on West Third.

KM: Wow.

EH: 150,000 men I think the story said and they would kind of mingle towards the flats to see the hookers. [laughter] As is those times were.

KM: So how old would you say the house is were that you lived in?

EH: Hundred years old and my home is one hundred and two I think.

KM: Wow.

EH: So it's a century home although it's a small, two bedroom aluminum siding. I'm looking into trying to have it declared some kind of landmark to preserve it from the onslaught of the neighborhood being taken away from the people that live in it. As I said I sit on an acre of land and there's five acres of open land next to me and there's a park behind me and my neighbors are chicken farmers so you know they want their land. [laughter]

KM: And then you said you have a large garden at your home?

EH: Yes I have a nice size garden as big as this room we're sitting in. I have a swimming pool in the backyard for the kids and there's a mulberry tree, an apple tree, a cherry tree and a pear tree in my neighbor's yard next to me. My area is very green during the summer and the nice months in Cleveland and the winter it turns brown where everything dies off the trees, but you get this cool industrial factory look in the wintertime down here with the flames going off and the sun rising from the east.

KM: Wow, that's pretty neat. How many children do you have?

EH: Two, Seth and Marley.

KM: How old are they?

EH: Marley is fifteen and Seth is twelve.

KM: So they've grown up in the area, too?

EH: Yes.

KM: They go to the Tremont school?

EH: No, no we put them in Lutheran schools from our church which were in the area. Lutheran Memorial, Trinity, St. Mark's, now Lutheran West which is in Rocky River or Fairview Park.

KM: What were their schools like?

EH: Just like any other parochial school system. Tradition, values maintained and that's why we put them in those schools instead of this Cleveland public schools which I adore and love, but they've been in shambles since Paul Briggs started bussing in the area and tore the city apart.

KM: When did the bussing start in the area? Do you know?

EH: I think it started in this area in '78--(Tape Edited)--I've seen what it's done to the athletics in the city, I've seen what it's done to the kids and the parents. It's basically--. It's a crime what bussing has done to the people of Cleveland.

KM: It is still going on now in the area?

EH: Yeah, there's still some bussing in the area, yes.

KM: Do you think it had any kind of, or what kind of effect did it have on Tremont? Local schools?

EH: You know what it tore the neighborhood up. It tore the heart out of the people in the neighborhood. You could no longer walk to school with your neighbor or your friend, meet new people this way in your neighborhood. Now you were forced to go completely across town into another pocket of little Europe or little Africa or little Puerto Rico if you will you know and totally be defenseless as far as getting help and all that's documented through bussing itself it's been a shambles it's a crime. There ought to be a lawsuit against bussing what it's done to the people of Cleveland.

KM: That's too bad. Are there any local issues that are affecting Tremont right now?

EH: Yeah there are quite a few on the table. To name a few and this looks probably the biggest one is the innerbelt project it's been meeting have meetings going on now. Town hall meetings planning what they want to restructure the freeways leading in and out of downtown. This will personally affect Tremont because of the truck traffic in the area that is used the industrial valley that sits around us if you will and around the river and the amount of trucks that do frequent downtown Cleveland. The next project is the Phoenix Project which is the burning and the razing of the lower areas of Tremont. By the park where I live at and turning it into new homes and the beautification of that area. The other things that have been going on is that Tremont School has been tapped to actually be renovated or torn down and that's pretty scary because it is a landmark and they don't build schools like that anymore and we know this. To put something there would be a slap in the face of the architects that actually designed these huge facilities. Lincoln Junior High School or Lincoln High where I went is a monstrosity of a building with six floors and sliding doors and just a structure that's worthy of a museum. And that they have no problem leveling it--. I think that today they're seeing the older schools are made out of the brick that are lasting through

time and can be used for different things and some of the projects have been, not the projects but the schools have been turned into jails or apartment buildings if you will and I know Sheriff McFall actually wanted a facility to renovate like that.

KM: Hmm. What were they planning to do with the innerbelt in the area?

EH: Well the way traffic flows into Cleveland from the different areas and it's congesting. It's tough to get in and it's tough to get out. During a ball game--football or baseball--you're talking an hour to get in and out of the city and working downtown and seeing the traffic flows and where the bottlenecks are and what they're actually looking at making the city more user friendly. I wonder why they just don't put tollbooths up and that would break the traffic up into flows if you will.

KM: How about more recent in the 90s? Do have anything to say about the Michael White administration? How it affected Tremont at all?

EH: I had the privilege of working under Michael White as well as Voinovich and Kucinich and Stokes so I've got to see a lot of the different mayors' platform. What Michael White has continued to do for the city even though he's not in office if you will. Behind the scenes what he has accomplished as a mayor and the things he has brought to the forefront have been very beneficial to the city as well as Tremont. Of course most of his loyalties lie on the east side, he had to befriend the west side of Cleveland if you will or the west siders, we don't want to call colors, but trying to mix the colors and the money of downtown Cleveland to benefit the city as well as the neighborhoods was Mike's goal and I think he did that. What we read about and have read about the toes that he stepped on as Dennis did and sometimes those are the measures that a mayor has to take to bring forward truth and honesty in government for the benefit of the city as well as neighborhoods themselves. You know our president Bush has overlooked the neighborhoods and those are the first things that are crumbling are the neighborhoods and that's why the whole thing is kind of slipping away.

KM: Okay. What do you think of the Gateway project they put in in Cleveland? Do you think it was a good idea, or?

EH: I remember the Central Market form being a kid and the comedy clubs that were in the area and the other things, the bars. Gateway has been a vital pump into the city, without a doubt. They promised us a dome and that's how they sold it and they didn't put a dome on it. They promised a sin tax for a short period of time and the sin tax is still going on, as a matter of fact I can't think of a tax they ever took back but you know. [laughter] Yeah, it's been a vital pump into Cleveland. What Gateway has done has put a jewel Cleveland's Crown as well as the Rock Hall and the Science Center and the new stadium and the development of the Gateway area and the continued development of the Gateway area and the lake front is vital for the city to go forward.

KM: Overall, since you've lived here how do think Tremont has changed? It's a big question, but?

EH: There's been reverse white flight, you know whites are coming back with families. There are a lot of single people here also though. Tremont is made up now of more than shops of that nature then when I was a child but now of more bars and restaurants and going into that kind of avenue which is kind of conflicting with the neighborhood itself. Now you can't park in front of your house, you can't park in front of the church, they're fighting over parking spaces in the neighborhood with the churches and the neighborhood people. So those kind of things have changed in Tremont, but other than that it's grown, it's stayed the same and it's finding a new identity I think. But its foundation has been in religion and that nature because the churches are not going to leave their neighborhoods so that will always maintain. So what ever happens in Tremont in the future will probably have to revolve around those things and the new renovation I don't think is totally cued into that yet.

KM: Like the new houses they're building and things like that?

EH: Yes.

KM: Are you--?

EH: It's kind of a separate entity from Tremont like and this is West Bay Village this is East Bay Village, you know.

KM: Are most of the new people moving into the new places they're building here or are they moving into existing houses in the area?

EH: They're moving into the newer houses that are built the high-end \$350,000 homes. It's mind boggling yeah. [laughter] But that's a great thing for Tremont and we need those kind of people in our neighborhood because it brings in increased police security, it brings increased business, it gives us a big stamp and a voice in the downtown area. Our ward used to be run by three councilmen, now it's just run by one and he has to deal with downtown which is a whole different animal itself and then he has our neighborhood and he has part of the east side to deal with also, so it's juggling three hats and it's an impossible job. But you know this--. With goes Tremont goes downtown.

KM: You're councilman now is Joe Cimperman.

EH: Joe Cimperman, yes.

KM: What was the reaction in Tremont form the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks?

EH: Heidi and I were at home getting ready for work and we saw it on TV it was really surreal. In the area I say again there was a time that where people united and felt commonly that we are one and that lasted for about a week or two [laughter] and then it went back to same old same old. 9/11 as far as security in the area there really hasn't been a presence of that although our second district officers do give us better service since 9/11. They're looking for different things if you will. There isn't really a big Arabic or Muslim pocket in

Tremont so it's not something you know have to tend to, more terrorist attacks in Tremont would be your white person kind of psycho deals.

KM: Yeah. Did a lot of people put flags up in their yards?

EH: Yes, as I said this an old world community and you'll see American flags everywhere. You'll see Polish flags, you'll see German flags, you'll see Czechs you know. I've got an American over my house and I'm looking for a, I don't know, I've got so many nationalities in me [laughter]. Just the American says it all.

KM: Sure, what was I gonna say. [pause] What do you think about the city services in Tremont?

EH: They're consistently good. The garbage is phenomenal. It's the best run department in the city. I have an ongoing talking relationship with my garbage people, the mail service the same way. If there's a problem with a light or other city services I working for the city at one time know that if you call and present your problem to them it usually will be taken care of in a timely fashion. Other times there's been this bureaucracy in city services that don't get anything done. Case in point there was an arsoned house at the end of my street and I've been calling for like six months trying to get this thing taken care of. So I finally saw one of the girls from Tremont West and I says "Well you said you were going to get something done with this house" and the next day it burned. [laughter]

KM: That's something.

EH: Yeah I told her don't come on my property anymore. [laughter]

KM: What has Tremont West really done for the community? If anything? [laughter]

EH: It's going to take a long term to evaluate Tremont West's presence in the area. Same with Clark Metro Development and the Dennison Development and all these other little satellite developments that were implemented. What it has done was--is--reuniting and rebuilding the neighborhoods around the downtown ring and making homes, I wouldn't say more affordable for the average Joe because the average Joe aren't buying these homes. But what it's doing is creating pockets and uniting pockets of wealthier people and wealthier homes and appealing you know those areas to the West Side of Cleveland. I don't know if it's really gone through on the east side and this kind of thing on the east side really does not have a core foundation that I've noticed. There are, of course, over at MLK and Thurgood Marshall and the Fairfax area and Longwood as those projects are implemented and progressed. The way the old Woodland Market area is being transformed and up to East 55<sup>th</sup> which again is part of the Tremont neighborhood. So those will take a long term outlook, but so far it's had a positive effect on the city itself as I said these are nice homes that are going up and with the nicer homes comes a nicer quality of neighbor if you will versus your yow-yow who lives next door who throws his trash out the back door. [laughter]

KM: While you were growing up, what were some of the holidays that were important to your family?

EH: I beg your pardon?

KM: What were some of the holidays that were important to your family while growing up?

EH: Well, all Christmas is of course my favorite holiday. I love the music. Fourth of July meant that everyone was usually off work and we could actually go to the old Euclid Beach Park and go down to the lake or go down to the zoo or to Brookside Park and watch baseball and softball. Easter and any other religious holidays of course played a big part in our family as well as everyone in the Tremont area. Even if you did not per se celebrate religion you would go over your buddy's house to say "Hey come on let's go play" his parents would go "No, we have to go to church today" or "Today's a holiday, no playing, look he's got his good clothes on" so darned it. [laughter]

KM: How do get around the neighborhood? Did you walk a lot or bike?

EH: We had skateboards at the time we would get old crates from the market and take roller skates and make like box skateboards. We would bicycle of course. Owning a bicycle was a big thing as it made you mobile as it does today and the European tradition of having an automobile, a bicycle was used as that function.

KM: Okay. What do you do now? Do you take a bike around?

EH: I bike in the neighborhood. I drive to work. My first car was a Volkswagon--when I was sixteen I bought it down here in the neighborhood and couldn't get up the giant hills that we have I couldn't find second gear--. [laughter] But I bike in the neighborhood usually or I walk. Everything is so close that you know driving could be a problem even finding parking.

KM: Did you guys have a car when you were growing up here?

EH: Oh yes, my mom had a Cadillac, nice one, looked like the bat mobile. [laughter]

KM: Oh cool.

EH: She had an old Lincoln and my brother--(Tape Edited)--, bigger cars if you will those were the styles in the day, a large automobile.

KM: Do ()--. Do any of your brothers and sisters still live in Tremont?

EH: They don't live in Tremont--(Tape Edited)--no they're not really in the Tremont area.

KM: Okay. [pause] [tapping] Do have any memories of during the Vietnam War in Tremont? What was going on here?

EH: My memories of the Vietnam War are kind of funny both my uncle served in it and my oldest one, William, he had a tough time when he came back. He disappeared for like ten years and we found him up in Boston and he was a school teacher by profession, he was washing dishes. He had totally walked out of it. They moved moved up into Yonkers New York near White Plains. My Aunt Betty lives up there she was a Rockette and she owns a Brownstone--. Kenny turned to alcohol and moved down to Atlanta. He was a pilot in the Air Force and he does not fly anymore. In the neighborhood of Tremont after the Vietnam War guys were coming back some of them maimed, a lot of them didn't come back. The movie Deer Hunter being shot down here and those kind of connections to the Vietnam War were very personal. This being a religious and ethnic neighborhood--. You had a lot of volunteers and a lot of men drafted during that time that it was the thing to do you know. "Joey you're stupid, you're never going to graduate high school, go into the army" [laughter]. "I'd like to go but there's a war going, well too bad." Yeah those had--it had an effect that way and a lot of funerals, a lot of funerals.

KM: What were funerals like in the area?

EH: They made me decide what kind I want and I like kind of a New Orleans Mardi Gras style. [laughter] But they were very solemn a lot of black, older people all the family turned out for them. The eulogies were you know special because you knew this person from a childhood as perspective to an adult. I was a couple of years behind so I wasn't involved in it, but you know the effects of it and the age bracket connected anyone.

KM: Good, okay. How would you characterize just the racial atmosphere in Tremont now? Is it tension died down, things okay or?

EH: I don't think there's really any tension per se with the neighborhood people. Although Tremont's a neighborhood where a lot of outsiders come into visit and et cetera. There aren't a lot of black left in Tremont the ones that are that live in the projects still can't afford to dine and drink in the neighborhood. Beers have gone from a dollar, a dollar and a quarter to like three fifty. So that took care of that. Most of the people in Tremont are you know now again white again and that imbalance in the--. As it was there was a balance between cultures, now it's gone back to being mostly a white neighborhood. The troubles in Tremont in the bars that happen are usually from outsiders from other cities like Lakewood, Parma if you will and they're usually starting with someone also from a suburb. Rarely will a Tremonter--Tremonger--get into trouble in a bar you know if there not you know doing something illegal. There were a couple a guys that tried to rob one of the bar and he was shot and killed and so. I know that the next day I went into the bar and I'm black and they're like "Okay we got to shoot you too!" [laughter] and I'm like "Come on guys, I've been coming to this bar since I was fifteen." [laughter]

KM: Is there anything else you want to let me know about your life in Tremont.

EH: Overall I'd say it's always been a positive experience. The people that I know and the political nature that Tre--Cleveland--. Tremont has a politics to itself being involved with downtown and the churches has always kept us in the loop of what happens in the city. Those thing and the courage that Tremont has given me as growing up as a child and adult have pretty much carry myself the way I am today and I consider myself semi-successful. I've been a mascot for the Cleveland Crunch Soccer Team, I was a cheerleader for the Cavs, my first ten jobs were at Cleveland Browns stadium as a kid working as a vendor and then I worked for the recreation department and elevated myself through politics working for different mayors and became the chef for the city of Cleveland for five years. And so those things that I've done--and go away to college--those things have been instilled in me through my mother and through Tremont and the people of Tremont. Each culture giving a unique perspective on life and what it takes to survive. You don't see a lot of suicides in this area and that's really unique because of the strong upbringing of family and tradition and those things of that nature that help make up the individuals of the country eventually a neighborhood and go on to be president one day, as Dennis is trying to do.

KM: That's really great, that's really good to here. Now actually I think that's it. So anything else you wanted to say or anything? You did a great job. So--.

EH: Oh, thank you. If you wanted to stop it for a second.

KM: I'll--.

END OF INTERVIEW